Pocahontas and Ignou Ouaconisen: Profitable Native Princesses

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The eastward crossing of the Atlantic by Native Americans during the early modern period remains an understudied topic in the history of European imperialism. This overlooked phenomenon is all the more surprising since "these Americans were the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries' most persistent and accessible wonders[1]." Besides becoming "instant celebrities" who attracted huge crowds, these exotic visitors facilitated peace alliances and contributed to capturing investors' interests in Northern American settlements[2]. Furthermore, the meticulous staging of their visit by European governments served to showcase successful colonial policies. Depending on how well they served expansionist goals, these visiting Indians were celebrated and remembered very differently. In this article, I compare the contrasting legacies of two Native American princesses who sojourned in Europe at that time: the Powhatan princess Pocahontas, who stayed in London in 1616, and the Missouri princess, Ignou Ouaconisen, who visited Paris in 1725. Despite many similarities between their stories and purpose of their European sojourns, these two Native American princesses diversely impacted the collective imagination. Since the 17th-century, the legend of Pocahontas has largely been used to legitimize British imperialism and, later, to ease American white supremacist consciousness. I argue that the seemingly innocent Disney direct-to-video sequel, *Pocahontas II: Journey to a New World* (1998), participates in this tradition and communicates a dangerously simplified representation of "otherness," conveying a message of English culture's superiority. However, the factual and fictional documents accounting for the visit of Ignou

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1 Alden Vaughan, *Transatlantic Encounters. American Indians in Britain, 1500-1776*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009, p. xii.

2 Vaughan, p. xii.

Ouaconisen reveal a more complex relationship between 18th-century French and Native Americans. In this article, I contend that the comparison between a 20th-century American fairytale on film and an 18th-century French chronicle – through different means of relating historical facts – uncovers enduring stereotypical representations of Native American women and imperialistic (colonial and postcolonial) issues at stake.

1. Pocahontas in London: Disney's rewriting of Native-American history

Capitalizing on the commercial success of its animated hit, *Pocahontas* – which generated over $1 billion in revenues worldwide in 1995 – Disney released three years later a direct-to-video sequel that focused on the sojourn of Pocahontas in London in 1616[3]. Similar to the original movie, the animation studio claimed that it relied on historical events and tried to convey a "balanced and informed view of the Native America[n] [4]" culture. However, Disney's efforts to feature a story "that is fundamentally about racism and intolerance" and that promotes "respect for each other's cultures[5]" should be disputed, as it is not consistent with the sequel's narrative. Such discrepancy with historical and cultural facts is even more concerning as the wide distribution of Disney movies often establishes the prevalence of the studio's perspective on a given topic, especially with regard to their young audience and the "Disney version [often] becomes the definitive version[6]."

The rewriting by Disney of Native American history in *Pocahontas* and *Pocahontas II* is particularly troublesome and reveals the studio's tendency to use "history as a mechanism by which the company furthers its American and Eurocentric agendas[7]." The animation studio has been criticized for its

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3 Gary Edgerton and Kathy Jackson, "Redesigning Pocahontas," *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, 24.2 (1996), p. 92.

4 *Pocahontas: Press Kit*, Burbank: Walt Disney Pictures, 1995, p. 33. For instance, the studio hired Native American advisors – including Powhatan Native Shirley "little dove" Custalow McGowan – to insure a more authentic and positive image of Native American characters (Edgerton and Jackson, p. 93).

5 Thomas Schumacher, senior vice president of Disney feature Animation in *Pocahontas: Press kit,* p. 35.

6 Glen Keane, supervising animator for the character of Pocahontas in Owen Gleiberman, "Disney's Indian Corn," *Entertainment Weekly* 279 (1995): p. 42. Web. 8 August 2016.

7 Ilan Michel Smith, "The United Princesses of America: Ethnic Diversity and Cultural Purity in Disney's Medieval Past," in Tison Pugh and Susan Aronstein

tendency to perpetuate cultural stereotypes "that portray, (…) in a "cute" way, the Otherness of the areas of the world that the United States has come to dominate. (…) It does this by utilizing stories from the past (…) in such a way as to reinforce the values and cultural practices of America[8]." Disney relies on a "predictable fairy tale film schemata[9]" likely to satisfy its audience's expectations.

In doing so, the animation studio is part of a long history of appropriation and rewriting of Pocahontas' story by colonial powers, namely the British Empire and the American democracy[10]. In *Pocahontas II* particularly, the historical visit of the Powhatan princess to England in 1616 is completely revisited and stripped of all controversial issues, as I'll demonstrate. Moreover, it provides a closure to the first open-ended movie: answering the question to "what happened to Pocahontas[11]" after the departure of John Smith. It also returns to the traditional Disney movie's happy ending: the female heroine is reunited with her saver/lover and the sequel ends with the image of the kissing couple sailing away to America, seemingly promised to a "happily ever after" future. This image is in veritable contradiction with Pocahontas' gloomy death in Gravesend in early spring 1617.

While the animation studio's intention was never to produce a documentary but rather a film "inspired by legend[12]," it is important to note that Disney carries on a tradition initiated by 17th century British chroniclers. Most of these writers used the Powhatan princess' visit to London to advertise and promote the British Crown's imperialistic goals. As the first

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(ed.), *The Disney Middle Ages. A Fairy-Tale and Fantasy Past.* New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012, pp. 209-224.

8 Schaffer, Scott. "Disney and the Imagineering of Histories," *Postmodern Culture*, 1996, Vol. 6 (3). Web.

9 Pauline Greenhill and Sidney Eve Matrix. *Fairy Tale Films: Vision of Ambiguity*. Logan: Utah State University Press, 2010, p. xi. Aspects of this conventional plot line (featured in the sequel's narrative) include: 1) a girl falling in love with a young man and/or looking to pursue her dreams; 2) a force of evil wanting to destroy the girl (or her family); 3) the capture/endangerment of the girl by the evil force; 4) the rescue of the girl by the young man; 5) happy ending, typically a marriage or promise of one. (Greenhill and Matrix, ibid.)

10 For a synthetic presentation of Pocahontas' story main interpretations, see for instance William Rasmussen and Robert Tilton, *Pocahontas: Her Life & Legend*. Richmond: Virginia Historical Society, 1994.

11 Interview of Irene Bedard, the voice of Pocahontas in both movies in Susan King, "Pocahontas, re-revisited," *Los Angeles Times,* 20 Aug. 1998, 6. Web. 8 August 2016.

12 Peter Schneider, Disney animation president, *Pocahontas: Press kit*, p. 37.

Native American who arrived in England already baptized, Pocahontas was displayed as an "expedition's centerpiece[13]" and introduced as a "living proof that American natives could [indeed] be Christianized and civilized[14]."

From the outset of her visit, Pocahontas was introduced as a model Native American: "Sir Thomas Dale is arrived from Virginia and brought (…) ten or twelve old and younge of that countrie, among whom the most remarquable person is Pocahontas[15]." John Smith emphasized her unique status when presenting her to Queen Ann. She was not only "the first Christian ever of that Nation, the first Virginian ever spake English, or had a childe in mariage by an Englishman," but her "extraordinarie affection to our Nation" and "love to us and Christianitie"[16] also made her remarkable. She was treated with all the honors bestowed upon distinguished guests, being presented to the bishop of London, the Queen, and the King himself. All "entertained her with festival state and pomp[17]." Contemporaneous chroniclers emphasized the way she "carried herself as the daughter of a King" and imposed respect not only upon "the Company (…) but [upon] divers particular persons of honor, in their hopeful zeal by her to advance Christianity[18]." Her popular portrait by Dutch engraver Simon Van de Passe – who depicted her in a severely European costume – provides a visual summary of the role played by Pocahontas' visit to England[19]. She "epitomized England's hope for a multiethnic but thoroughly Christianized and Anglicized American society[20]." Thus, long before Disney would "cast its long shadow over the tale[21]," the Powhatan princess' legend – repre-

13 Vaughan, p. 78.

14 Rasmussen and Tilton, p.7.

15 John Chamberlain, *The Letters of John Chamberlain.* Philadelphia: The American philosophical society, 1939, vol. 2, p. 12.

16 John Smith, *The Generall Historie of Virginia, New England, and the Summer Isles.* London: 1624, p. 122.

17 Hakluytus posthumus, or Samuel Purchas, *His Pilgrimes: contayning a history of the world in sea voyages and lande travells by Englishmen and others*. Glasgow: Glasgow, J. MacLehose and sons, 1905-07, vol. 19, p. 118.

18 Purchas, vol. 4, p. 1774.

19 For a more precise analysis of Van de Passe's portrait, see Rasmussen and Tilton, p. 32.

20 Vaughan, p. 86.

21 Drew Lopenzina, "The Wedding of Pocahontas and John Rolfe. How to keep the Thrill Alive after Four Hundred Years of Marriage," *Studies in American Indian Literatures,* XXVI, 4 (2014), p. 65.

senting her as "the rescuing angel[22]" for the colony – had been created and already impacted the American and European public's imagination.

When the animation studio decided to focus on the Native American princess' story, it had faced harsh criticism from various ethnic groups about racial stereotyping in recent productions: especially *Aladdin* (1992) and the *Lion King* (1994)[23]. The studio was trying to redeem itself by featuring a courageous and strong-willed female Native-American as the main character of its new movie. While some of the heroine's actions indeed assert her independence, intrepidity, and determination (she stands against her father's will, she follows her duty rather than her love at the end of the first movie), most of her decisions demonstrate her attraction toward British way of life and desire to abandon her own culture[24]. The analysis of several key moments and song lyrics demonstrates Disney's bias in favor of English culture, thereby endorsing views and stereotypes similar to those promoted by the British colonizers during the early modern period[25].

Recurring themes featured in *Pocahontas II* are the heroine's amazement with an enchanting London, her awe for its inhabitants, and her readiness to embrace English values[26]. The movie quickly focuses on Pocahontas' departure from Jamestown, embarking on a diplomatic mission for England, accompanying John Rolfe. She sets out aboard the English vessel. Once the British coast appears, the most "pristine and inviting" town is revealed before the Powhatan princess' incredulous eyes: "a sparkling clean London, a city painted in cheerful colors, full of charming Tudor cottages, bright awnings, trees and gardens, (…) the very epicenter of civilization[27]." A cheerful song entitled "What a Day in London" appropriately accompanies this marvelous vision. All the inhabitants, including a beggar and an undertaker carrying a coffin, are joyful and sing lightheartedly "how wonderful

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22 Wernitznig, p. 19.

23 Edgerton and Jackson, p. 90.

24 The sequel opens on a confused Pocahontas singing how her "world has changed," how she has "learned to choose" (against her people), and how she "doesn't feel part of" this life anymore (Walt Disney Studios. "Where do I go from here?" *Pocahontas II.* Perf. Judy Kuhn. Walt Disney Records, 2009.)

25 On Disney's tendency to feature non-white heroines fighting against their own culture, see Ilan Mitchell-Smith, p. 210.

26 I further the argument developed by Radha Jhappan and Daiva Stasiulis in their article "Anglophilia and the Discreet Charm of the English Voice in Disney's *Pocahontas* Films," in Mike Budd and Max Kirsch (ed.), *Rethinking Disney. Private Control, Public Dimensions.* Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2005, pp. 151-177.

27 Radha Jhappan and Daiva Stasiulis, p. 160.

this London day turned out to be[28].” Pocahontas herself is overwhelmed by her discovery and “can’t believe [her] eyes” as illustrated by the lyrics in her song. Her verses are full of intensifiers, comparisons of superiority, and the quantifiers “each” and “every.” Furthermore, London is seemingly incomparable: it’s “everything [she’s] heard and more,” it’s “nothing like [she’s] seen before” or that she “never dreamed [she]’d see.” This representation of the “uncivilized” other – i.e. the way Europeans portrayed the Native-Americans (fascinated and amazed by the “Old Continent’s” productions) – is a cliché that was frequently used in the Early Modern Period.[29] Such a depiction of London did not reflect the early 17th-century reality however. At that time, “London had not yet passed the threshold to modernity[30].” The London seen by Pocahontas would more likely have been a “wretched, miserable place, seething with poverty, disease, crime, horror, and cruelty. Ravaged by virulent infectious diseases[31].”

Even more problematic is the underlying comparison between English customs and Native-American ones. The main plot and resolution of the sequel rests on Pocahontas’ ability to fit in to the aristocratic British society and demonstrate that she is not a “savage;” if she can “prove to me she is as civilized as you claim I will stop my Armada[32]” from killing the Powhatan people, assured the king to John Rolfe. One of the movie’s notable sequences entails Pocahontas’ transformation into a Lady-like princess. A Cinderella-esque transformation happens before the spectators’ eyes: from the lightly clothed Amerindian to the fair-looking, largely coiffed, and ball gown dressed young lady. This visual transformation is reinforced by the song’s lyrics: “Wait Till He Sees You[33].” A sense of expectation is given by the repetition of the verb “wait” and the preposition of time “till,” while the future tense expresses the ineluctability of the transformation. The scene concludes with a low-angle shot, adopting the characters’ (and spectators’) viewpoint, dramatizing Pocahontas’ majestic descent down the stairs. While such a physical transformation is typical for a Disney movie, it takes on a cultural meaning when concerning a Native-American during the colonial

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28 *Pocahontas II*, “What a day in London.”

29 See for example the discovery of Paris by Zilia in the Letter XIII of Françoise de Graffigny’s *Letters from a Peruvian Princess*.

30 Camilla Townsend, *Pocahontas and the Powhatan Dilemma.* New York: Hill and Wang, 2004, p. 138.

31 Jhappan and Stasiulis, p. 160.

32 *Pocahontas II: Journey to a New World.* Dir. Bradley Raymond and Tom Ellery. Perf. Irene Bedard, Dold Gibson, Jim Cummings, Finola Hughes, and Linda Hunt. 1998. Walt Disney Studio, 2000.

33 *Pocahontas II.* “Wait Till He Sees You.”

period. As Sophie White has convincingly argued, the act of dressing is not insignificant and "material culture served to complicate the ascendancy of a hegemonic protobiological model of difference in the colony as applied to Indians[34]."

Overall, English culture is presented as the "pinnacle of civilization" and most English characters are associated with positive qualities[35]. John Rolfe is the archetypal example of this civilization and his caring attitude, especially toward Pocahontas' animal friends, guarantees his success with a young audience. Ratcliffe is eventually the only character that "carries the racism and greed of the movie (…). He is more of a colonialist than a settler[36]." Because of these caricatured features, the prejudiced and heartless governor is singled out and the condemnation of his actions does not negatively impact the rest of the English people.

In the end, the primary focus of the sequel remains the love story between the Powhatan princess and the English gentleman. The heart-lifting final scene presenting the two lovers sailing to America is consistent with Disney's expected happy ending and makes for a predictable production. Given the impact of Disney productions, it is regrettable that the actual European sojourn of Pocahontas did not inspire a more thought-provoking movie, even for a young audience. The absence of reflection on more challenging issues such as institutionalized racism, cultural stereotyping, and colonialism to favor a "seductive, politically correct, 'love conquers all' ending[37]" is objectionable: "Fairy tales and fantasies have traditionally challenged children (and adults) with the unpleasant realities lurking just beneath their placid exteriors. Audiences are likely to enjoy added depth and suggestiveness enough to buy plenty of tickets and merchandise."[38]

By using the Powhatan princess' visit to London to strictly generate more profit, Disney repeats the same colonial pattern as the one initiated by the Virginia Company almost four centuries earlier. It is important to emphasize that Pocahontas' treatment was neither unique nor specific to the British colonization of the American continent. It was consistent with the way other visiting Native Americans were treated during the colonial

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34 Sophie White, *Wild Frenchmen and Frenchified Indians: Material Culture and Race in Colonial Louisiana*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012, p. 2. Furthermore, this episode is most significant as it is the turning point in John Rolfe's falling for Pocahontas in the sequel.

35 Jhappan and Stasiulis, p. 153.

36 Duncan Marjoribanks, Ratcliffe's supervising designer and animator in *Pocahontas: Press kit*, p. 40.

37 Lopenzina, p. 61.

38 Edgerton and Jackson, p. 95.

period: being used as publicity stunts by major European trading companies. They were, after all, the ultimate object for early-modern curiosity, and thus perfect advertising material. It is intriguing, however, that these visitors did not all receive the same level of fame or legacy. A prime example is the oblivion of an historical episode – remarkably similar to Pocahontas' story – that involved the French Company of the Indies and a Native-American princess of the Missouri tribe.

2. The forgotten story of the Missouri Princess

During the autumn of 1725, Louis XV received a delegation of five Indians belonging to different Louisiana tribes. Among them was a Missouri chief's daughter named Ignou Ouaconisen[39]. At this time the colony of Louisiana was still in its early days and the French monarchy, hoping to accelerate its colony's territorial and commercial development, granted the trading and mining monopoly to the Compagnie des Indes in 1717. Unfortunately, the credit scheme initiated by John Law in 1720 was a failure and resulted in the worst financial crash of the time. In the years following this collapse, the Company was eagerly looking to restore its economic prosperity and modify its negative image:

> C'est une chose certaine que le pays de la Louisiane est dans une très mauvaise reputation et qu'il y a très peu de gens dans le monde qui ne s'en fasse une idée des plus affreuses [it's certain that the country of Louisiana has a very bad reputation and that there are very few people in the world who don't have the most terrible idea about it.][40]

In this context, the Company's directors decided to bring a group of Native-Americans to France hoping to: "réveiller l'attention du public toujours en bien sur ce qui regardoit la Compagnie des Indes [positively awaken the public's attention with regard to the Company of the Indies][41]." In 1722, they charged Etienne Véniard de Bourgmont with the mission to "invite some of the chiefs of the principal Indian tribes to travel with him to France, in order to give them an idea of the power of the French[42]." After many setbacks a group of four Indian chiefs belonging to different Louisiana

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39 "Etat des passagers embarqués sur la flutte La Loire, 19 janvier 1726," Archives Nationales d'Outre-Mer, F5B49, f. 19.

40 "Mémoire de Purry au Duc d'Orléans et aux Directeurs de la Compagnie des Indes," ANOM, C13A, f. 76.

41 *Bibliothèque Nationale de France*, Manuscrits français, Nouvelles acquisitions, 2551, fol. 81.

42 ANOM, B43, f. 93.

tribes – Illinois, Missouri, Osage, and Oto, and the daughter of an important Missouri chief – arrived in Paris in early September. Bourgmont, Jesuit Father Nicolas Ignace de Beaubois, and Bourgmont's aide sergeant Dubois accompanied them.

The Compagnie des Indes provided for the delegation's expense and entertainment[43]. They were treated like other important foreign visitors and "were shown all of Paris' curiosities[44]": from the Invalides' kitchen, to a performance at the Opera, to the royal domain of Versailles, to the water-pumping machine of Marly, and to the palace of Fontainebleau. Like Pocahontas, they met prominent courtiers and important members of the royal family. They also crossed paths with important public figures of the time such as Voltaire who wrote about his encounter with Ignou Ouaconisen in his *Dictionnaire philosophique*:

> En 1725, on amena quatre sauvages du Mississipi à Fontainebleau. J'eus l'honneur de les entretenir; il y avait parmi eux une Dame du pays, à qui je demandai si elle avait mangé des hommes. [In 1725, four savages from Mississipi were brought to Fontainebleau. I had the honor to converse with them; among them was a Lady of the country, whom I asked if she had eaten men.][45]

They also had the honor to be granted an audience by the French king himself, Louis XV, and a few days later were invited to participate in a hare coursing in his company[46].

The dignitary status of Ignou Ouaconisen – the Missouri chief's daughter – is evidenced by the magnificence of the presents she was given, including a dress made of damask in the color of fire with golden flowers assorted with gold and silver ribbons[47]. Contrary to Pocahontas, who arrived in England already baptized and married to an English man, the Missouri chief's daughter became a Christian during her stay in France. She was baptized at the Notre-Dame Cathedral and shortly thereafter married

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43 The detailed account of their visit is given in "Relation de l'arrivée en France de quatre Sauvages de Missicipi," *Mercure de France*, December 1725, pp. 2827-2856.

44 "On leur a fait voir tout ce qu'il y a de curieux à Paris" in *Mercure de France,* p. 2830. See Also, *Suite de La clef, ou Journal historique sur les matieres du tems.* XIX, March (1726), p. 209. For a very similar tour of the French capital, see the detailed visit of Ottoman ambassador, Mehmed Efendi, in 1720. Mehmed Efendi, *Le Paradis des Infidèles*, Paris: La Découverte, 2004, pp. 109-122.

45 Voltaire, "Anthropophages," *Dictionnaire philosophique portatif.* Londres, 1764, p. 26.

46 *Mercure,* p. 2840; pp. 2849-2850.

47 *Mercure,* p. 2834.

Sergeant Dubois who had accompanied Bourgmont on his mission[48]. The similarities between the Powhatan and the Missouri Princess stories stop here though. As opposed to Pocahontas, Ignou did indeed return to America and outlived her husband who was killed in 1728. She remarried to another Frenchman, Louis Marin, the captain of militia in New Chartres and had three children with him before she died in 1739[49].

During their visit Ignou and the rest of the Louisiana Indians' delegation certainly sparked the French public's curiosity. The *Mercure de France*'s chronicler comments on the courtiers' avid inquisitiveness when the Indians visited the king in Fontainebleau in November:

> Le 24, ils furent conduits chez tous les Princes, Princesses, et autres Seigneurs et Dames de la Cour qui s'empressèrent de voir des hommes Sauvages, qu'ils furent surpris de trouver aussi plein d'esprit et de bon sens que les hommes ordinaires [On the 24th, they were taken to all the Princes, Princesses, and other Sirs and Ladies of the Court, who hurried to come see the Savage people, whom they were surprised to find as full of wit and common sense as ordinary men].[50]

The precise description and attention to the Indians' reactions while attending a performance at the Opera also attests to the French crowd's interest in scrutinizing the slightest gesture of these exotic foreigners: "ils se frottoient les mains de joye, et se tiroient les uns et les autres pour marquer les choses qui les surprenaient le plus [they rubbed their hands out of joy and pulled one another to show the things that surprised them most][51]." In September, soon after their arrival, the Parisian public had a unique chance to satisfy its curiosity when two of the Indians performed traditional dances

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48 Jean François Benjamin Dumont de Montigny, *Mémoires historiques sur la Louisiane, contenant ce qui y est arrivé de plus mémorable depuis l'année 1687 jusqu'à présent.* Paris : J.C.B. Bauche, 1753, II, p. 76.

49 David MacDonald, *Lives of Fort de Chartres: Commandants, Soldiers, and Civilians in French Illinois 1720-1770*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2016, p. 137.

50 *Mercure,* p. 2838. About the aristocratic crowd's curiosity for foreign visitors, see the Chevalier d'Arvieux's decription of Soliman Aga's visit to Paris in 1669, in Laurent d'Arvieux, *Mémoires du chevalier d'Arvieux,* Paris: C. J. B. Delespine, 1735, pp. 144-145.

51 *Mercure,* p.2831. For a better documented relation of Native Americans attending a performance at a French theater and the related crowd's curiosity, see *Six Indiens rouges de la tribu des Grands Osages, arrivés du Missouri au Havre le 27 juillet 1827*, Paris: Delaunay, 1827, p. 35.

at the Théâtre des Italiens. Such an "unusual novelty[52]" had to meet the French mob's taste for the exotic other[53].

The paucity of contemporary testimonies is rather surprising when considering the unique characteristics of the Louisiana delegation, especially the presence of an Amerindian princess who became a Christian and who was married on French soil. Commenting on this strange silence, historian Arnaud Balvay emphasizes the fact that the king's marriage to Marie Leszczynska on the 4th of September overshadowed the Native-American's visit[54]. Furthermore, the lack of sources mentioning the Louisianan visit could also be explained by the commercial ineffectiveness of this voyage. Similar to the Virginia Company with regard to Pocahontas' stay in England, the French trading company gained nothing from the Mississippi Indians' journey to France and even lost money. The only ones who directly benefited from this were the three individuals who accompanied the Native Americans: Bourgmont, Dubois, and Father Beaubois. Bourgmont was granted the noble title of *écuyer* (squire) [55] in December 1725, Dubois was promised the next available ensign position (which implied a salary increase[56]), and Father Beaubois returned with a new treaty reorganizing the Catholic missions in Louisiana (with an increased number of Jesuit missions) and a personal assignment in New Orleans as the supervisor of the Jesuit missions in the colony[57]. Despite the lack of contemporaneous testimonies and the unsuccessful results of this visit for the Company of the Indies, the French sojourn of the Louisiana Indians accompanying Ignou Ouaconisen created its own legacy throughout the eighteenth century and after.

Immediately following the visit, a few texts contributed to propagate a depiction of the Mississippi Indians' visit emphasizing three main stereotypical traits: the bedazzlement of the Native Americans discovering

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52 *Mercure de France,* September 1725, p. 2274.

53 Foreign visitors' sojourn in France could provoke a large public gathering. See, for example, Mehmed Efendi's descriptions of the crowd following him everywhere five years previous. He describes people falling in the water, fainting, almost smothered, and waiting hours in the cold rain just to see him. Mehmed Efendi, p. 76; p. 85.

54 For other reasons explaining the silence surrounding this visit, see Balvay, pp. 80-81.

55 Frank Norall, *Bourgmont. Explorer of the Missouri, 1698-1725*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988, p. 87.

56 ANOM, B43, f. 575: ensign's certificate expectancy; f. 643: salary for 1727.

57 ANOM, A22, ff. 155-163: "Traité avec les Révérends Pères Jésuites Missionnaires à la Louisiane, 20 février 1726," Concerning Father Beaubois's assignment, see f. 160v.

French splendor, their lack of civilization, and the debauchery of Ignou Ouaconisen. In line with the intended objective of the Indian delegation's visit – "to inspire these barbarians a favorable idea of the French and thus to bond them with this nation[58]"– the *Mercure de France*'s chronicler insists on the strong impression produced on the visitors by the Parisian curiosities: "leur étonnement sur les belles choses qu'ils y ont vues est inexprimable [their astonishment with the beautiful things they saw there is inexpressible[59].]" The fact that the Louisiana Indians are presented as unable to even "express" their surprise is consistent with a colonial rhetoric which accentuates the discrepancy between these two cultures. The legend of these Native Americans as being amazed by their encounter with French civilization is found in two other texts published a few decades later. In 1753 Dumont de Montigny's *Memoirs*, edited by clergyman Jean-Baptiste Le Mascrier, provides a narrative of the visit, insisting on the Indians' satisfaction with the "thousand of marvels" they saw and the wonderful presents they were given.[60] The description of this unique sojourn can also be found in Jean-Bernard Bossu's *Nouveaux voyages aux Indes Occidentales.* Narrating his trip to the Illinois country in the French colony, the French marine captain recounts how he met an old man who was part of the delegation who visited Paris. The Illinois Indian told Bossu what he saw was so incredible that when he told his fellow countrymen about it, no one trusted him and believed that the French had cast a spell upon him.[61] Bossu insists on Ignou Ouaconisen's own fascination with the marvellous things she saw in France: "La Princesse Indienne raconta à ses compatriotes la magnificence qu'elle avoit vu à la Cour de France, où elle avoit étée bien accueillie, et comblée de présens [The Indian Princess told her fellow countrymen about the magnificence she had witnessed at the French Court, where she had been well-received and showered with presents[62].]"

Related to the Indians' portrayal as fascinated by French culture is their representation as lacking any form of civilization. Such a characterization of Native Americans is a recurring model throughout the 18th century[63]. The carefully chosen anecdotes in the *Mercure de France* are an implicit but efficient means to convey this idea. Inconspicuously located in the middle of

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58 ANOM, C13A8, f. 171v.

59 *Mercure de France,* p. 2831.

60 Dumont de Montigny, pp. 75-77.

61 Jean-Bernard Bossu, *Nouveaux Voyages aux Indes Occidentales*, Paris: Le Jay, 1768, pp. 162-165.

62 Bossu, p. 162.

63 Michèle Duchet, *Anthropologie et histoire au siècle des Lumières*, Paris: Albin Michel, 1995, p. 11.

a seemingly objective description, the chronicler's choice of presenting these short episodes highlight the contemporary perception of the visitors. These vignettes, obviously included for the amusement of the reader, present the extremely naïve, almost childish behavior of the Native Americans: their irrational fear of the water, their strange curiosity for the cauldrons and the roasting spits of the Invalides' kitchen, their childlike joy and demeanor at the Opera, and their fascination with the animal fountains of Versailles due to their misunderstanding of the mechanism. The chronicler's attention to the description of their costume – or rather their absence of costume – is another way to signify their lack of civility to the French reader. The constant contrast between the nudity of the "sauvages" and the strict etiquette of the ceremonies they attended could only disconcert the *Mercure*'s readership and those they encountered[64]:

> Ils étaient en habit de cérémonie de leur pays, c'est-à-dire, nuds, tout le corps barboüillé de différentes couleurs, ayant en tête un bonnet de plume, et pour couvrir leur nudité, un morceau d'écarlatte passé dans une ceinture [They were in the ceremonial dress of their land, that is to say utterly nude but with all of their body dabbed with different colors and with a feather head-piece and, to cover their nakedness, a red loin cloth attached to a belt.][65]

Voltaire himself contributed to propagating the stereotype of the Louisiana Indians' savagery[66]. In his article on cannibalism in the *Dictionnaire philosophique*, he reports that he questioned Ignou Ouaconisen on the reality of her cannibalistic habits and she allegedly confirmed his belief[67]. Narrated in an anecdotal style, the philosopher emphasizes the

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64 Louis XV forbade the queen to meet the Indians precisely because of "leur assortiment sauvage et trop bizarre [their savage and too strange costume.]" (*Mercure,* p. 2850)

65 *Mercure de France,* p. 2829. English translation in Richard N. Ellis and Charlie R. Steen. "An Indian delegation in France, 1725," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society,* LXIV, 4 (1974), p. 390.

66 A sensational tradition initiated by the Jesuit in their *Relations*. The Jesuits often emphasized in their descriptions "the brutal torture, often followed by cannibalism, that various groups meted out to their enemies" (Micah True, *Masters and Students. Jesuit Mission Ethnography in Seventeenth-Century New France*, Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015, p. 83.

67 The assertiveness with which Voltaire reports his discussion with Louisiana native under the assumption of an absolute linguistic transparency has to be challenged. This claim is in contradiction with the actual communication problems (both linguistic and cultural) between the Native American visitors and the French elite. Both the *Mercure* and colonial archives mention Beaubois and Bourgmont who served as intermediaries between the Natives and the French.

ingenuity of the Indian woman as a way to reinforce the veracity of her testimony (and his as well): "elle me répondit très-naïvement qu'elle en avait mangé [she replied very naively that she had eaten some[68].]" The conversation continues with Voltaire's profoundly shocked reaction and the supposedly apologetic response by the Native woman: "elle s'excusa en disant qu'il vallait mieux manger son ennemi mort que de le laisser dévorer aux bêtes [she apologized by saying that it was better to eat one's dead enemy rather than let it be devoured by animals[69].]" While it is probable that Voltaire met the Louisiana Indians and had a conversation with Ignou, the truthfulness of his remarks is doubtful as Missouri Indians were not cannibals. Creating this anecdote, however, enables the philosopher to defend his anthropological theory[70] and to develop an argument on the so-called civilized cultures' barbarity – echoing the famous section devoted to the cannibalistic Brazilian Indians in Montaigne's *Essay*[71].

Voltaire's choice to feature the Missouri woman in his text is consistent with her depiction as a licentious character in other 18th-century texts. This legend's instigator is Jean-Baptiste Le Mascrier who edited Dumont's *Mémoires*. In this text, the clergyman portrays Ignou as the mistress of Bourgmont, who married Dubois seemingly for materialistic reasons (as she "received presents from all the ladies of the court and from the king himself[72]," on the occasion of her marriage with a Frenchman). It also claims she plotted her French husband's murder while back in Missouri, eventually renounced her Christian faith, and returned to live with her tribe.

With so many elements available to spark the creation of a legend, it is surprising that Ignou Ouaconisen's story has been almost completely forgotten. One of the reasons behind this oblivion perhaps lays in the unsettling impression the Mississippi Indians made on the French public that resisted stereotyping. Unlike Pocahontas the Louisianan delegation was invited to France in the context of an important diplomatic mission. French officials had to treat a group of people traditionally depicted as uncivilized and barbarian with all the honors bestowed upon distinguished guests. Even more problematic for contemporaneous witnesses was the extremely educated and cultured behaviors demonstrated by these "savages" throughout their visit, which appears in the numerous harangues printed in the *Mercure de France*. Moreover, their speeches suggest that the Indian

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68 *Dictionnaire philosophique*, p. 26

69 *Ibid.*

70 Michèle Duchet, pp. 302-312.

71 Michel de Montaigne, *Œuvres complètes*, Paris: Gallimard, 1962, pp. 200-213.

72 Dumont de Montigny, p. 76.

chiefs were not as much impressed with the French greatness as expected. The allegiance to veracity sworn by the *Mercure*'s editor[73] partially explains the more complex vision of reality written in the chronicle versus the one in the Disney movie. Finally, the French colonial failure in Louisiana did not create the need for a founding myth such as the one involving Pocahontas, considered "the 'mother' of the nation and the female counterpart of George Washington[74]." When Disney reprises this myth without questioning the historical conditions of its emergence, it repeats the same tradition of violence and propagates it thanks to cheerful and eye-pleasing characters, seemingly innocent anecdotes, and a happy-ending. The animation studio is part of a narrative tradition that endorses "the centrality of Western culture and its ongoing domination of others[75]." Disney thus replicates the unremitting quest for lucrative profit led by the major trading companies during the early modern period.

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73 See editor La Roque's "*avertissement*" in the January issue of the *Mercure* in 1724.

74 Ramussen and Tilton, p. 7.

75 Henry Giroux and Grace Pollock, *The Mouse that Roared: Disney and the End of Innocence*, Lanham: Rowman and Littlefied Publishers, 2010, p. 111.

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